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HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES OF THE ROMA (GYPSIES)

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Human Rights Abuses of the Roma (Gy...

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED THIRD CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

APRIL 14, 1994

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



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HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES OF THE ROMA (GYPSIES)

THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 1994

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY,
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:11 p.m., in room 2200, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Tom Lantos (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. LANTOS. The Subcommittee on International Security, International Organizations and Human Rights will be in order.

I want to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses to this hearing on human rights abuses against the Roma, a people often called gypsies. I believe this is the first congressional hearing to focus specifically on the Roma, who are a trans-national minority, and not the minority of a single nation.

Since human rights abuses against the Roma must be addressed in an international context, I am delighted that we will hear testimony today from leaders of Romani communities in Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and the United States.

A few days ago, I returned from a trip to Russia, where conditions have worsened since my last visit a few years ago. The promises of a free market economy still elude many Russians, and the difficulties in adjusting to a market economy have been far greater than anticipated.

Consequently, the optimism and euphoria that swept Russia, as well as the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with the fall of communism have been supplanted by frustration, a search for scapegoats, and a horrifying resurgence of ethnic violence.

Among those hardest hit by the economic crises and racial intolerance triggered by the collapse of the Communist regime are the estimated 6 million Roma living primarily in Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, in the Czech Republic, and also in Poland.

To many in the United States, the term "gypsies" evokes an image of people who dress like Spanish flamenco dancers, wander the countryside in brightly painted wagons, and play Hungarian violin music. However, as we will learn today from our distinguished witnesses, modern reality for the Roma is in very harsh contrast to this romantic image.

A bit of background information may be useful. The Roma migrated from northern India around the 10th century. They were mistakenly assumed to be from Egypt; hence the name gypsy.

Many settled into a nomadic lifestyle in the mountains and forests of Central and Eastern Europe.

During the Second World War, the Roma were targeted for extermination by the Nazis. Although accurate records were not kept, it is estimated that at least 500,000 Roma were killed, frequently with the collaboration of the local population.

Under Communist rule, many Roma were settled in housing projects and took jobs as unskilled laborers in the least desirable industries. Overt anti-Romani discrimination, however, was suppressed. Press reports indicate that many Roma believe their lives were better under Communist rule—they had jobs, housing, and were relatively free from ethnic violence.

Today, the Roma are the largest dispersed minority on the European continent. With the elimination of former Communist government subsidies for housing and employment, unemployment among the Roma has skyrocketed—up to 80 percent of the Roma living in Romania are unemployed, as are about 70 percent of the Roma in Hungary. Many of the estimated 6 million Roma live at a subsistence level.

I think it can be stated without exaggeration that the plight of the Roma is the disgrace of Europe.

But perhaps a bigger problem, in the new regimes preoccupied with economic crises, is the development of an atmosphere in which human rights violations of a despised minority has become acceptable.

Racial intolerance and ethnic violence are condoned, and have resulted in repeated attacks on the Roma both physically and verbally. Anti-Romani violence has been the worst in Romania, whose government characterizes it as a social problem rather than as the blatant discrimination it is.

The Roma have had to face racial discrimination in education and housing, segregation in hospitals, “no gypsies allowed” signs in restaurants and private facilities, coercive sterilization of women, and ill-treatment by the police and the justice system.

I would like to note that this discrimination and abuse has been a feature of the life of the Roma throughout most of their history. They too were victims of the Nazi Holocaust. I very much welcome the attention that the Romani community has been given by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, particularly recognizing them at the National Civic Commemoration last week in the rotunda of our Capitol. And I understand that this morning the Romani community was recognized in a special observance at the Holocaust Museum.¹

Let me just cite a few examples of the kind of human rights abuses which the Roma face. Bigotry is one of the most pervasive problems that the Roma must face. All accounts describe a widespread perception by the mainstream population that the Romani people are a despised, marginal social problem.

Last September 3, Slovakian Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar said, with respect to “the population activity of the whites and of the Roma,” the Roma constituted a “socially unadaptable popu-

¹ A summary of the U.S. Holocaust Museum ceremony in honor of the Roma (Gypsy) victims of the Holocaust is printed in the appendix.

lation"—I'm quoting—with a high birth rate of "children who are poorly adaptable mentally, poorly adaptable socially, children with serious health disorders, children simply who are a great burden on this society."

Eighty percent of all Romani children drop out of school by age 10. Romani children begin school with a language barrier. The Romani have a distinct language, and many children are not fluent in the language of the country they are living in. Romani children can therefore quickly fall behind, and many capable Romani children are then sent to schools for the mentally retarded. This is an outrage.

The human rights group Helsinki Watch reports the attitudes of doctors and government officials who promoted the sterilization of Romani women are still present in some hospitals where Romani women are placed in segregated and overcrowded maternity wards.

Amnesty International reports ill-treatment of Roma by law enforcement officers in Hungary and Slovakia, and torture and ill-treatment of Roma by police in Romania and Bulgaria.

While police are quick to respond to crimes allegedly committed by Roma, police often fail to respond to crimes against the Romani community. In Romania, police are reported to have stepped aside and watched local thugs beat Roma and torch Romani houses.

Our witnesses at today's hearing are leaders in the Romani community. Nicolae Gheorghe, a sociologist from Romania, is coordinating secretary of the Federation of Roma in Romania and a senior spokesman for the Roma in various international organizations, including the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Klara Orgovanova is a psychologist and head of a social work organization serving Romani children and women in Slovakia. Until recently she served as a minority specialist in the Slovak Government.

Andrzej Mirga is an ethnographer of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and chairman of the Romani Association in Poland. He also serves as chair of the Romani Advisory Council of the Project on Ethnic Relations at Princeton.

Ian Hancock is a professor at the University of Texas. Dr. Hancock has represented the Roma at the U.N. as a UNICEF representative. He is a linguist and chairman of the Great Romani Encyclopedia Committee. He is also president of the International Roma Federation.

I am also pleased to welcome Ms. Livia Plaks, associate director of the Project on Ethnic Relations. This organization was founded in 1991 to encourage the peaceful resolution of ethnic conflicts in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation.

The Project on Ethnic Relations' Romani Advisory Council recently participated in a Romanian field project on means to reduce community violence against the Romani populations.

Let me, in conclusion, express my very sincere appreciation to Ms. Andrea Nelson of my subcommittee staff, who has prepared this hearing today, and Mr. Michael Ennis, a most able Republican staff member of the subcommittee.

I also want to pay special tribute to two women who have been in the forefront in calling attention of the Congress to the human rights abuses against the Roma. First is my wife, Annette Lantos, who for many years has had a special concern with these abused and persecuted people. And second is Dr. Kay King, who is sitting in the front row, who formerly was my associate on my congressional staff. She has a deep personal commitment to improving the conditions of the Roma. Both of them worked closely and actively with Andrea Nelson in preparing this hearing today.

We will begin the testimony, although shortly I will have to interrupt because we have a vote. The first witness will be Livia Plaks, associate director of the Project on Ethnic Relations. We are pleased to have you.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Lantos appears in the appendix.]

STATEMENT OF LIVIA PLAKS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

Ms. PLAKS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Contrary to the popularly assumed image of gypsies as a free and untroubled people, the Romani population everywhere in fact endures systematic gross deprivation of their human, social and civil rights.

The situation at the present time is approaching crisis proportions. Some specialists on the Roma in Eastern Europe predict that unless it is recognized and addressed immediately, it will lead to a tragic disaster for the Roma in the next decade.

The main reason for alarm among human rights groups and Romani activists is the deteriorating economies of Eastern Europe, and the fact that the nationalist movements need an easy scapegoat for their attacks, which they find in the Romani population.

The Roma do not have a state behind them. They are not a powerful lobby. Many people in Eastern Europe hold them in contempt. The Roma have long been the outcasts of Europe, and it is sometimes forgotten that they were among the victims of the Holocaust.

They were the targets of enforced assimilation by the Communist authorities, whose programs all too often destroyed coherent alternatives and left poorly educated, unemployed populations living in deep poverty, segregated, despised by the majority groups, victimized by the darkest prejudices and hatreds, and lacking the group cohesiveness or leadership required to defend themselves against violence, let alone to compete for a place in the sun.

The Project on Ethnic Relations that you are familiar with has undertaken a number of efforts in the last few years with the Romani community. I will just mention a couple.

Two major conferences, one in Czechoslovakia and one in Romania where Romani leaders sat face-to-face for the first time with governmental leaders in charge of minorities, and the Roma specifically.

The establishment of the Roma Advisory Council is another step toward giving international recognition to young Romani leaders who have a voice in their community.

Recently we arranged for our team of police management and mob violence prevention specialists to visit Romania with the scope of providing expert advice on preventing and controlling outbreaks

of mob violence, and the broader issues of the administration of justice and the effectiveness of policing at the local levels, especially as it relates to the Romani community. Mr. Gheorghe and Mr. Mirga were part of this team.

And lastly, we have brought several Romani political leaders from Eastern Europe and from the United States to Washington to address the American policymakers and to suggest ways that these policymakers could support their efforts.

And since you have all the information about my colleagues, I thank you very much.

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you very much. Our next witness is Mr. Nicolae Gheorghe, coordinating secretary, Federation of Roma in Romania. We are pleased to have you.

STATEMENT OF NICOLAE GHEORGHE, COORDINATING SECRETARY, FEDERATION OF ROMA IN ROMANIA

Mr. GHEORGHE. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much in my name and the name of my colleagues for this chance to give testimony before your subcommittee. I have to say to you that I am impressed by the complexity and accuracy of the background picture that you offered to all of us. It makes our job much easier.

And I would like to stress the fact that this hearing is a step in the process that we began some years ago to build our people as a political people in the Greek sense of this term.

This means to contribute to the education of our people as responsible citizens of the country where they are living, and to look at how the governments of these countries are respecting the rights of our people as citizens of these states.

From this point of view, in my short introductory remarks, I would just like to stress the vulnerability of our people in present conditions. We will hear people who will illustrate this general picture with particular facts and particular aspects like police and mob violence, citizenship status in the new states of Eastern Europe, and repatriation, which has exposed those of us who look for refugee asylum in Western Europe. My colleagues will share some details about this.

What I would like to stress is the vulnerability of our people, illustrative of the vulnerability of the system, of the society in which we are living because, if the cases of violence against Roma are not brought to justice, it is because the rule of law in our countries is still very fragile.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Gheorghe, please continue. I will just step out to cast my vote.

Mr. GHEORGHE. Thank you very much.

Mr. LANTOS. But please continue.

Mr. GHEORGHE. It is this rule of law which has to be consolidated in our countries. We find that the cases are being slowly worked through, with difficulty, are brought before the courts. This illustrates the way in which this rule of law tries to replace the lack of law which characterized our societies before 1989.

It is this aspect that was mentioned in the background, that the Roma are a dispersed people in different countries which contributes very much to their vulnerability. The fact that they are stateless leads to cases where they become homeless, to the burning and

destruction of their houses because there is no protector behind them.

But this vulnerability, I would say it creates for the Roma a sort of test, like a sort of barometer measuring the state of democracy and the transition to democracy in a variety of countries.

Looking at specific cases of violations against persecuted Roma, we can measure the degree of rule of law in those countries. I would like just to give an example.

In 1990, and the summer of 1991, 200 Roma from Mostar in Bosnia, what was Bosnia before, were expelled from the city. Very few people noticed at that moment or at that time. They don't know what disaster lead to this practice of ethnically cleansing territories and countries.

If we have enough acuity to pay attention in time to the problems encountered by our people, I think that we can avoid much more serious dangers that can appear in our countries.

I would like, in concluding, to speak not only about vulnerabilities, but about the assets of our people. When we speak about the Roma in our regions, we speak about millions of people. It is a people who are industrious, who contribute to the society in which they are living. That's why they were enslaved in some societies, because their work was considered to be useful.

In countries like Romania, where I come from, 200 years ago when the landlord lost his slaves, he was considered poor. Landlords put a lot of money into sending the police to other countries to bring them back because they needed their labor force.

The last decades of Communist-lead economic development and the practice of assimilation transformed them into unskilled workers.

The democracy now emerging in our countries, and the free market, can offer a chance, an opportunity to recapture the skills of our people, and to stimulate the entrepreneurship which exists among our people.

I am thinking here about the role of the United States in stimulating and encouraging investment in a free market and in a free enterprise system in our countries, and in earmarking foreign aid by directing some part of the resources toward job training and job creation for our people.

From this point of view, our people can be carriers of democracy in the countries where they are living. They were sometimes marginal in society because they refused to be integrated into the industrial world, and big collective farms of the Communist economy.

Now, this marginality can be recaptured in the economy and society as an asset and as a support for promoting liberalization and consolidated democracy in our countries.

I just conclude by asking you to monitor carefully, state by state, how the rule of law is applied in dealing with Romani cases. I appreciate the fact that the annual report about the state of human rights produced by Congress and the State Department the past 2 years carefully notes this situation in our countries. We would like to see our authorities pay attention by solving the problems about which you express your concern.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Gheorghe appears in the appendix.]

Mr. KING. Thank you very much. And I want you to know that the reason the State Department pays as careful attention as they do to the Roma is because Congressman Lantos raised that issue with them a couple of times, and the State Department finally agreed to include that as part of the human rights report.

I think that is an important point.

Thank you very much, Mr. Gheorghe. Dr. Orgovanova, would you like to make your presentation?

STATEMENT OF KLARA ORGOVANOVA, PSYCHOLOGIST, SOCIAL WORKER AND FORMER ADVISOR ON MINORITIES IN THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT

Ms. ORGOVANOVA. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I am sorry, but my English is not good and I have asked for an interpreter.

Mr. KING. That will be fine.

Ms. ORGOVANOVA. [As interpreted.] OK. The situation in the post-Communist countries, most of them, is very similar and so it is just very much like my colleague, Mr. Nicolae Gheorghe, talked about.

I am therefore not going to talk about the same subject and mention the same cases that my colleague talked about. I will be talking about the situation in Slovakia.

In Slovakia, the new economic situation lead to a definite worsening of most people's economic situation, but the Romani population was much harder hit.

The Romani people belong to the poorest segment of the population. They are not very well-educated and consequently suffered the most in the situation.

In these new conditions, Roma are unable to organize their own forces, and better their own situation. Consequently, their possibilities in comparison with the rest of the society are much worse.

I would especially like to mention one situation concerning Slovakia. This situation became apparent after the division of Czechoslovakia into Slovakia and the Czech Republic because both the Czech and Slovak Republic enacted new laws concerning citizenship of the two countries.

This law concerns mainly the Romani population and is most discriminatory against that population. This is particularly true in the Czech Republic because the majority of the Roma living in the Czech Republic are originally from Slovakia.

This citizenship law orders them to live at least 2 years permanently in the Czech Republic in order to be able to ask for citizenship. For 5 years prior to application they cannot have any police record.

This unfortunately concerns very many Romani families, and consequently they cannot even apply for citizenship. So according to this law, they now have until June of this year to apply for Czech citizenship, provided they fulfill these conditions, and after that, if they don't and if they are unable to apply, they would be considered noncitizens and foreigners in the Czech Republic.

By now many of the Romani families living in the Czech Republic have returned to Slovakia, but the conditions there are very bad for them. Nobody was prepared for that migration.

This is one of the issues I would like to turn your attention to because this concerns the former Czechoslovakia.

I would like to say that the Romani population is part of the general population of each of the two countries. Consequently the approach of the government should be the same for the Romani population as it is for the rest of the population.

Their specific needs should be respected. Since 1989, the political situation in Slovakia is often changing. Since 1989, the Slovak Government has done little about the Romani situation.

The new Slovak Government after 1992, changed its attitude.

And now the new government in power for about a month just never took any position on the situation and question of the Roma. So consequently all this appears sometimes to be a power play by some of the powerful groups, and of course, this is the situation the Romani population suffers.

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you. Thank you very much, Dr. Orgovanova.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Orgovanova appears in the appendix.]

Mr. LANTOS. Before introducing our next witness, I want to recognize our distinguished former Ambassador to Romania, Mr. Rudolph Aggrey, who is sitting here in the audience. We are very pleased to have you, sir.

Our next witness is Dr. Andrzej Mirga, chairman of the Roma Association of Poland, and an ethnographer from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. We are very pleased to have you, sir.

STATEMENT OF ANDRZEJ MIRGA, CHAIRMAN, ROMA ASSOCIATION IN POLAND

Mr. MIRGA. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen. We Roma perform many activities and different roles because some of us are academics, others are politicians or try to be politicians, and at the same time, we play a leading role in our Romani societies, so our experience is very similar despite the fact that we are from different countries and different regions.

Instead of restating what I wrote, I would like to present step by step what would be appropriate to support our struggle in post-Communist countries.

In recent years, Romani NGO's achieved at least the desired goal of international recognition, and many international institutions are willing to recognize the Roma as a European ethnic group.

Since the Roma formed a group without being a nation state with an ethnic territory, and since they are dispersed, and citizens of most countries in the region, there is a need to clarify their legal and political status both at the national and international level.

Laws in some post-Communist countries recognize Romani ethnic or national minority status. That process of recognition and granting minority status must be strengthened and supported from outside.

At the same time, however, Romani NGO's observe other cases of legislation against the Roma which limit Romani status and po-

litical activity. Such cases should be noted and discussed at an international level.

In the wake of increasing racial violence against the Roma, we deserve a more vigorous implementation of commitments of CSCE states to adopt laws against acts of violence and special measures for enforcing protection of those Roma who are exposed to such racial violence by intervention, for example, or missions and mediation including the use of representatives of international bodies.

The crisis inherent to transition to market economies of post-Communist countries reinforces the cycle of underdevelopment, poverty, lack of housing, violence, and insufficient health care for the Romani population.

Such a transition causes growing deviance which increases ethnic and racial violence against Roma. This is an argument for developing specific projects for the Roma in Europe.

The experiences accumulated in some countries in developing social, economic, educational and other forms of support for the Roma population must be shared with Romani NGO's or other institutions of participating states, and that experience should be expanded and provide concrete action plans for the Roma.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Mirga appears in the appendix.]

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you very much. Before introducing our last witness, I would like to call on the distinguished ranking Republican member of the Foreign Affairs Committee who has been a steadfast, courageous and indefatigable champion of all human rights, and especially human rights for the Roma, Congressman Gilman.

Mr. GILMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I merely want to commend you for conducting this hearing. Too few people, too few lawmakers, too few nations recognize the problem of human rights abuses of the Roma, and it is for that reason that we welcome this hearing, and we thank you for taking the time to appear before us to give us the benefit of your views.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you very much, Congressman Gilman. Our final witness is Dr. Ian Hancock, President of the International Roma Federation, and professor at the University of Texas. We are very pleased to have you, sir.

STATEMENT OF IAN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL ROMA FEDERATION

Mr. HANCOCK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity provided to us to make our voices heard before you.

I have four points to make, and I will make them as concisely as I can. First of all, the Romani population in Europe numbers literally in the millions, although everywhere the same population occupies territories historically belonging to other populations, and as a result, in a sense, are outsiders everywhere.

Unless this situation can be accommodated, there will be disruption on a major scale in different countries—economic, social disruption. Attempts to exterminate the Romani population have been

made twice since our presence in Europe over the past centuries. We're still here.

The only alternative is integration. We're not going anywhere.

The second point is that our ancestors are not historically European. I'm a linguist by profession, and there is a maxim in sociolinguistics which is that language is the vehicle of culture. Our people express themselves not in a European language, but in an Asian language. We are an Asian people historically in a non-Asian part of the world.

There is no possibility of returning to Asia. Until we are recognized in this way, and until our world view is taken into account, and incorporated into the interactive process, then there will always be misunderstandings.

Typically Romani minority populations everywhere have not been treated in this way. We have been denied national minority status in one country after another, and treated as a population defined by behavior, despite, in the case of most of us, various obvious physical differences and certainly linguistic and cultural differences.

This cannot continue if we mean to succeed in the interactive process.

The third point is that our present situation is simply the end of a continuum that reaches back into history. The proper way to understand our situation and to address it is to recognize the historical circumstances that have brought us to the present condition.

Especially in Eastern Europe, in ex-Communist nations, several generations have grown up under an ideology which does not recognize the historical component. The Communist philosophy does not look backward, it looks ahead, and so what factors such as, for example, five and a half centuries of slavery in Romania have not been recognized as a component in the prejudice which exists today. It is very much a component.

My fourth and last point is that the way to redress this is through education. In recent years, the United States has taken on an increasingly active involvement in the affairs of Eastern Europe, and is leading the way toward a new society.

As a part of this, and as today testifies, there is an increasing awareness on the part of the American administration of our people, of our presence, of our distinctiveness, of our problems.

But if we are to be recognized properly and to have the involvement and support of the American people, then the American people must also come to know us better, and the theme of my report which you have before you is that the media has a very large responsibility in disabusing itself of the old Hollywood notion that we are happy, free, wandering people with tambourines and wagons and so on.

Our reality is very, very different, and the Hollywood image must stop. I do not want to perpetuate the self-image of victim. We have been victimized, it's true. But given equal opportunity and given the training that is necessary, we are more than capable of handling our future and working in cooperation, not assimilating, but integrating with the societies around us.

I implore representatives of the media here today to take the initiative, take the first step in reporting our situation accurately. If

the people in Bosnia being murdered and relocated are Roma, call them Roma. Don't hide us behind the label Muslims.

If 80 percent of the children in Romanian orphanages are Romani children, say so. Don't hide us behind the label of orphans.

If up to 80 percent of the asylum seekers in Romania are Roma, call us Roma. Don't hide us behind the label of refugees and asylum-seekers. Only by describing our situation to the world will we be taken seriously and will changes begin to be made.

Thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hancock appears in the appendix.]

CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN POLICIES TOWARD THE ROMA

Mr. LANTOS. Thank you very much. Let me invite an answer to a question, and I invite any or all of you to respond.

Which of the Central or East European countries, in your view, has at this time the most progressive and enlightened policy toward the Romani people?

Would you like to begin, Dr. Hancock?

Mr. HANCOCK. We get the most encouraging reports from Macedonia. We get the least encouraging reports from Romania. Unfortunately I can't give you a lot of information about Macedonia except that the population is quite high.

Mr. LANTOS. What percentage of the Macedonian population?

Mr. HANCOCK. I have heard as high as 20 percent.

Mr. LANTOS. As high as 20 percent.

Mr. HANCOCK. Yes. Figures are always misleading.

Mr. LANTOS. Yes.

Mr. HANCOCK. Official figures and figures generated from within the Romani community differ considerably. The first tend to under-represent, the second tend to over-represent, but we have a number of academics in Macedonia. We have a fairly active press in the Romani language. There is even a movement in that country for the establishment of a territory.

I don't know if my colleagues can add to this information.

Mr. LANTOS. Would any—yes. Please.

Mr. GHEORGHE. Congressman, in my opinion, there is no government that has yet produced an articulate and coherent policy toward Roma. There are interesting attempts, and searches for solutions in different countries, but no government has pursued a comprehensive and articulate policy.

It is good that the Macedonian constitution recognizes the Roma as a minority, but it still has to be put into practice.

The point is that most governments in Eastern Europe tried to make showcases out of minority laws and policies towards the Roma, but I warn you to be careful watching the practical implementation of these nice laws.

On the other hand, we are speaking about taking the initiative. I will say, for instance, that the new law on minorities in Hungary and the resources offered by the Hungarian Government are encouraging some kind of movement to organize the Roma in that country.

Slovenia has an interesting initiative to clarify the legal status of Roma by special regulation. I would say that judging by known

government initiatives in Romania we have some interesting experiences, pilot projects which did not yet receive enough government support but deserve to be replicated on a broader scale.

I think that in order to answer your question, I would like to inform you that the CSCE and the Council of Europe decided to hold a seminar on the situation of Roma in the CSCE countries which may be held in September, the 20th to 23rd, before the follow-up meeting in Budapest which will start October 10, 1994.

I would like at this time to acknowledge the important contribution that the U.S. delegation to the CSCE meeting has made in supporting the promotion of our case in these meetings, and to have this seminar.

I think that the American contribution to the seminar and in making recommendations which will be worked on during the seminar, will be extremely useful to advise authorities in Eastern Europe on how to deal with this problem.

I will finish by saying that the main danger that is encountered by our people, as illustrated by the testimony, is the tendency to conceive of our people as a race, which is reflected in racial terms in the mentality of the population and sometimes in the attitudes of the government and other institutions.

So I think that your experience in dealing with this problem and in encountering institutional racism could be extremely useful in preventing such developments in our region.

Thank you very much.

Mr. LANTOS. Please.

Mr. HANCOCK. I would like to add a point to that. Of course, it should go without saying that there is a wide discrepancy between attempts at the legislative level to try to combat anti-gypsyism and at the popular level, where it's a daily occurrence, and one of the I suppose negative aspects of contact with the West in Eastern Europe is that the rhetoric of racism is being picked up in Eastern Europe, and the vocabulary of racism is now being directed at the Romani minority.

POTENTIAL U.S. ASSISTANCE TO CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Mr. LANTOS. Anybody else care to comment on this? Let me ask in terms of U.S. Governmental assistance in Central and Eastern Europe, what is there that we could be doing that we are not doing? Any of you?

Mr. GHEORGHE. I would like to answer you. I think the dominant political culture in the region is that of the ethnic nationalists.

Mr. LANTOS. Yes.

Mr. GHEORGHE. And there is a tendency to reconstruct European states and the legitimization of the existing governments in ethnic nationalist terms.

Mr. LANTOS. Yes.

Mr. GHEORGHE. One of the main contributions that the U.S. Government can make is to teach our authorities, to try to educate our political leaders according to the political culture of democracy that was forged in your country.

I think from this point of view, the most important assistance which can be brought to or sent to our region is the rule of law, the breeding of democratic institutions, and careful implementation

of individual human rights. These may be the important, essential contributions to change something in the area.

The danger that you can find is that our governments, in addressing the issue of minorities, include the Roma in terms of national rights, and that is a threat from my point of view, and I think that Dr. King when he wrote his book, made a good point of this.

Apparently this kind of policy might contribute something to the improvement of culture, but I think that we have to go to individual rights and to create the institutional frameworks where the citizens can enjoy their rights, and they have guarantees of their rights.

That is something that is lacking in our societies in general, and the vulnerability of the Roma illustrates the weakness of the idea of citizenship in our countries. That's on the one hand.

On the other hand, citizenship I think goes with some kind of autonomy, of self-reliance of individuals and community, and this is coming along with economic initiative and with economic enterprise.

Here I think that again American culture can make an important contribution. It is extremely important to assist the development of economic entrepreneurship of small scale business in the case of our people, to train them to provide services and produce goods for the market.

Here we are looking to a combination of measures addressing rights and economic development, and I would like to acknowledge here the contribution made from America by John Nichols, a businessman from New Jersey who visited Romania to explore the situation of Romani children in orphanages, as Dr. Orgovanova pointed out.

He left us a little bit of seed money which we tried to use to promote entrepreneurship among our people. We will try to add a little bit more money to this and to start what Dr. Hancock said, which is education in economic entrepreneurship.

To conclude, it is education that America can contribute, education of our political elite, of the authorities, of the majorities, and also economic education and stimulation of economic enterprise, and the values of the free market among our people.

Thank you.

Mr. LANTOS. I fully agree with you. Dr. Hancock.

Mr. HANCOCK. Mr. Gheorghe's reference to Mr. Nichols is a good example of how we in this country, and there are a million or more Romani Americans, can be a part of this. We want to be a part of this, but at the moment, we are an invisible ethnic minority. Most Americans aren't aware that we're here, and what they know about us is generally incorrect.

We would like to have from our Government in this country more recognition, more acknowledgement, and to play a greater part in the machinery. This country has a responsibility to the emerging Eastern European nations to be able to take part in the new order and I think this should not only be directed toward the situation of our people directly, but toward the administrations in the countries under discussion.

I learned recently that The Project on Ethnic Relations is preparing a handbook for media people in Romania, guidelines of what is correct and incorrect and so on. This is a very good thing. More of this sort of thing needs to be supported, and funded in a very practical way.

Something like a Peace Corps for Romani populations certainly would serve a function, too.

Mr. LANTOS. Let me just say, I am in full accord with all of your comments. I want to say on behalf, I'm sure, of many of my colleagues, that we are very conscious of the problem of the Romani people, and we are determined in our own way to assist in whatever manner possible to bring about not only the full recognition of individual human rights in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere, and this is a problem for the Romani people, but also to encourage a greater degree of sensitivity on the part of our Government with respect to these problems.

Congressman Gilman has an observation.

POSSIBLE CONGRESSIONAL EFFORTS IN ADDRESSING THE PLIGHT OF THE ROMA

Mr. GILMAN. Just one last request. What do you think best that the Congress can do to help in what you are seeking to do, and give better recognition to the Romani problem?

Mr. GHEORGHE. Well, you are more familiar with what American Congress can do than we are, so it would be hard to answer the question, but for instance, in the bilateral relations of the U.S. Government with the governments in the region, the issue of Roma can have a higher profile.

Mr. GILMAN. Absolutely.

Mr. GHEORGHE. And I think as the governments of the regions look for support, political support and economic support from the United States, you can make an issue out of how they treat the Roma.

I am speaking about the fact that you have regular discussions in this country about the Most-Favored-Nation status, and the Roma can become part of this negotiation. You can disseminate the political culture of America while dispensing money and economic help in the region.

That's one point. Another point I think you mentioned and I noticed with pleasure was that you used that term trans-national minority. Here is also something that has to do with the legislative export of America in recognizing the political and legal status of a people who do not have a territory.

In a region where states try to organize themselves on ethnic divisions of territories, and ethnic divisions of society, my colleague, Andrzej Mirga, mentioned this problem of clarifying the legal and political status of the Roma as trans-national. I don't know in what way, but I think that the expertise accumulated by the Congress can be of some assistance to both national governments and international institutions in trying to address this issue on a broader basis than strictly nation by nation, state by state.

Mr. LANTOS. I fully agree with you. I'm afraid we will have to finish because we have a vote going on, and Congressman Gilman

and I will not be able to be of assistance to the community if we miss our vote.

So let me on behalf of all my colleagues thank each of you for appearing, and let me assure you that we will continue to do our level best to be of assistance to you.

Mr. HANCOCK. I just wanted to make one comment, one last comment.

Mr. LANTOS. Please.

Mr. HANCOCK. You asked what Congress could do. If you have the power to get the laws against gypsies in this country stricken from the books, that would be an enormous step.

We are the only minority left with laws still in effect against us.

Mr. LANTOS. We will pursue that.

Mr. HANCOCK. Thank you.

Mr. LANTOS. I want to thank you all. This hearing is adjourned. [Whereupon, at 2:10 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF U.S. HOLOCAUST MUSEUM CEREMONY IN HONOR OF THE ROMA (GYPSY) VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

A small, by invitation only, ceremony took place at the U.S. Holocaust Museum on April 14 at 10:00 a.m. in the Hall of Remembrance to honor the Roma (Gypsy) victims of the Holocaust. About 25 people attended the ceremony that took place before the museum's eternal flame. Those in attendance included museum staff and executives, distinguished guests from the diplomatic community, the congressional community, the U.S. Department of State, Roma representatives from eastern Europe and the United States, and Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) staff. The first speaker was Father O'Connor who conducted the invocation and spoke of the terrible events of the Holocaust, the suffering of the Roma people, and the need to prevent such deeds from ever recurring. Sara Bloomfield, Museum Director of Public Programs and Congressional Relations, addressed the group on behalf of the museum with a reading from a work by a Romani artist and Holocaust survivor. She then introduced William Duna who is the Roma representative on the U.S. Holocaust Museum Council. William Duna then spoke about the tremendous historic significance of the ceremony in being the first such ceremony to officially honor the Roma people for their victimization during the Holocaust. Sara Bloomfield then introduced Livia Plaks, Associate Director of PER. Livia Plaks spoke of the little known fact of the Roma Holocaust, a fact which must be remembered. She introduced PER's Roma guests and political leaders from eastern Europe and the U.S., Nicolae Gheorghe, Andrzej Mirga, Klara Orgovanova, and Ian Hancock, with a short biography of each. These leaders each spoke of the need to remember the Roma Holocaust, and the discovery of their history and their own personal Romani identity. Ian Hancock spoke of the history of the Roma people, their suffering during the Holocaust, and the tremendous service the U.S. Holocaust Museum performed in officially recognizing their suffering. Andrzej Mirga read a poem written by a Romani woman Holocaust survivor from Poland and told of the annihilation of Roma villages around Auschwitz. Klara Orgovanova spoke of the racial selection of Roma for destruction during the Holocaust in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Nicolae Gheorghe spoke of discovering his personal identity as a Rom in Romania, although not as many Roma died in Romania as other parts of eastern Europe during the Holocaust. Sara Bloomfield then introduced Rabbi Laszlo Berkowitz who, as a survivor of Auschwitz, described the destruction of Roma in the camps. Rabbi Berkowitz spoke of the need for eternal memory to guard against the repetition of such events. Roma political leaders and other Roma guests were then handed white carnations which they placed, one by one, on a small bed of soil. Water was then poured on the soil. The flowers represented innocent souls and the water represented tears for the Roma victims of the Holocaust. The Roma present then sang their anthem, "Gelem, Gelem." The ceremony then closed.

Participants in the flower ceremony:

Livia Plaks
Dr. Ian Hancock
Dr. Klara Orgovanova
Dr. Andrzej Mirga
Nicolae Gheorghe
John Nickels
James Nickels
Sara Bloomfield
Bill Duna
Dr. Kay Atkinson King
Father John O'Connor
Rabbi Lazlo Berkowitz

**Statement of
Congressman Tom Lantos, Chairman
Subcommittee on International Security,
International Organizations and Human Rights
on**

**Human Rights Abuses of the Roma (Gypsies)
April 14, 1994**

I want to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses to this hearing on human rights abuses against the Roma, a people often called gypsies. I believe this is the first Congressional hearing to focus specifically on the Roma, who are a trans-national minority, and not the minority of a single nation. Since human rights abuses against the Roma must be addressed in an international context, I am delighted that we will hear testimony today from leaders of Roma communities in Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and the U.S.

A few days ago, I returned from a trip to Russia, where conditions have worsened since my last visit a few years ago. The promises of a free market economy still elude many Russians, and the difficulties in adjusting to a market economy have been far greater than anticipated. Consequently, the optimism and euphoria that swept Russia, as well as the countries of central and eastern Europe, with the fall of communism have been supplanted by frustration, a search for scapegoats, and a horrifying resurgence in ethnic violence.

Among those hardest hit by the economic crises and racial intolerance triggered by the collapse of the communist system are the estimated 6 million Roma living primarily in Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. To many in the United States, the term "Gypsies" evokes an image of people who dress like Spanish flamenco dancers, wander the countryside in brightly-painted wagons, and play Hungarian violin music. However, as we will learn today from our distinguished witnesses, modern reality for the Roma is in harsh contrast to this romantic image.

A bit of background information is useful: The Roma migrated from northern India around the 10th century. They were mistakenly assumed to be from Egypt; hence the name "gypsy". Many settled into a nomadic lifestyle in the mountains and forests of central and Eastern Europe. During the Second World War, the Roma were targeted for extermination by the Nazis. Although accurate records were not kept, it is estimated that at least 500,000 Roma were killed, frequently with the collaboration of the local population.

Under Communist rule, many Roma were settled in housing projects, and took jobs as unskilled laborers in the least desirable industries. Overt anti-Roma discrimination, however, was suppressed. Press reports indicate that many Roma believe their lives were better under communist rule -- they had jobs, housing, and were relatively free from ethnic violence.

Today, the Roma are the largest dispersed minority on the European continent. With the elimination of former communist government subsidies for housing and employment, unemployment among the Roma has skyrocketed -- up to 80% of the Roma living in Romania are unemployed, as are 70% of the Roma in Hungary. Many of the estimated six million Roma live at a subsistence level.

But perhaps a bigger problem, in the new regimes preoccupied with economic crises, is the development of an atmosphere in which human rights violations of a despised minority are acceptable. Racial intolerance and ethnic violence are condoned, and have resulted in repeated attacks on the Roma both physically and verbally. Anti-Roma violence has been worst in Romania, whose government characterizes it as a social problem rather than as the blatant discrimination it is.

The Roma have had to face racial discrimination in education and housing, segregation in hospitals, "no gypsies allowed" in restaurants and private facilities, coercive sterilization of women, and ill-treatment by the police and justice system.

I would like to note that this discrimination and abuse has been a feature of the life of the Roma throughout much of their history. They too were victims of the Nazi Holocaust. I welcome the attention that the Roma community has been given by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, particularly recognizing them at the National Civic Commemoration last week in the Rotunda of our capital. I understand that this morning the Roma community were recognized in a special observance at the Holocaust Museum.

Let me cite just a few examples of the kind of human rights abuses which the Roma face:

- Bigotry is one of the most pervasive problems the Roma must face. All accounts describe a widespread perception by mainstream populations that the Roma people are a despised, marginal social problem;
- Last September 3, Slovakian Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar said, with respect to "the population activity of the 'whites' and of the Roma," the Roma constituted a "socially unadaptable population" with a high birth rate of "children who are poorly adaptable mentally, poorly adaptable socially, children with serious health disorders, children, simply, who are a great burden on this society;"
- Eighty percent (80%) of all Roma children drop out of school by age 10. Roma children begin school with a language barrier; the Roma have a distinct language, and many children are not fluent in the language of the country they are living in. Roma children then quickly fall behind, and many capable Roma children are then sent to schools for the mentally retarded;
- The human rights groups Helsinki Watch reports "the attitudes of doctors and

government officials who promoted the sterilization of Romany women are still present in some hospitals where Roma women are placed in segregated and overcrowded maternity wards;"

- Amnesty International reports ill-treatment of Roma by law enforcement officers in Hungary and Slovakia, and torture and ill-treatment of Roma by police in Romania and Bulgaria. While police are quick to respond to crimes allegedly committed by the Roma, police often fail to respond to crimes against the Roma community. In Romania, police are reported to have stepped aside and watched local thugs beat Roma and torch Roma houses.

The witnesses at today's hearing are leaders in the Roma community.

- Nicolae Gheorghe, a sociologist from Romania, is Coordinating Secretary, Federation of Roma in Romania, and a senior spokesman for the Roma in various international organizations, including the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe;

- Klara Orgovanova is a psychologist and head of a social work organization serving Roma children and women in Slovakia. Until recently she also served as a minorities specialist in the Slovak government;

- Andrzej Mirga is an ethnographer from Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and Chairman of the Roma Association in Poland. He also serves as Chair of the Roma Advisory Council of the Project on Ethnic Relations in Princeton; and

- Ian Hancock is a professor at the University of Texas. Dr. Hancock has represented the Roma at the UN as a UNICEF representative. He is a linguist and Chairman of the Great Romani Encyclopedia Committee. He is also President of the International Roma Federation.

I am also pleased to welcome Ms. Livia Plaks, Associate Director of the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER). This organization was founded in 1991 to encourage the peaceful resolution of inter-ethnic conflicts in the new democracies of central and eastern Europe and the Russian Federation. PER's Roma Advisory Council recently participated in a Romanian field project on means to reduce community violence against Rom populations, with representation of specialists from the U.S. Poland, Russia and Romania.

Let me, in conclusion, express my appreciation to Ms. Andrea Nelson of our Subcommittee staff who has prepared this hearing today, and Mr. Michael Ennis, the Republican staff of the subcommittee. I also want to pay special tribute to two women who have been in the forefront in calling attention of the Congress to the human rights abuses against the Roma (Gypsies). First is my wife Annette Lantos, who for many years has had a special concern with these abused and persecuted people. Second is Dr. Kay King, who formerly worked on my congressional staff. She has a deep personal commitment to improving the condition of the Roma. Both of them worked closely and actively with Andrea Nelson in preparing this hearing today.

GAINING OR LOSING TOGETHER:
ROMA/GYPSIES AND THE EMERGING DEMOCRACIES OF EASTERN/CENTRAL EUROPE

by NICOLAE GHEORGHE

ROM CENTER FOR SOCIAL INTERVENTION AND STUDIES
Bucharest, Romania

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS ROMA ADVISORY COUNCIL (PERRAC)

1. ROMA: THE PECULIAR MINORITY OF (EASTERN/CENTRAL) EUROPE

Roma/Gypsies form a large population in eastern/central Europe: six to eight million or so and two to ten percent of the population of some countries or regions (Romania, southeast Slovakia), according to different criteria of identification and census-taking. The population identified as "Tsigani/Gypsies" of the region and of the world are split among a variety of linguistic, religious, and cultural groups; are territorially dispersed; and are distributed among various social strata of their host societies, with a majority of them being concentrated in the poor strata of those societies.

Because of these characteristics, Roma groups have accumulated a number of vulnerabilities and assets. Over time, and especially in the recent years of post-communist transitions in central/eastern Europe, certain vulnerabilities of the Roma have become conspicuously present in public life and have attracted the attention of public opinion and of the Roma themselves.

II. ROMA/GYPSIES' CUMULATIVE VULNERABILITY

(to be briefly and selectively introduced and eventually elaborated during testimony)

1. Among the vulnerabilities of Roma in the application of fundamental freedoms, civil, political and human rights, we might mention:

- anti-Gypsy prejudice and hostility expressed in the media; police brutality against Roma persons and groups (Bulgaria, Romania);

- destructive mob violence against Roma persons, houses, shops and other property (Mlawa, Poland); a number of villages in Romania (see attached documents), Miskolc, Eker and Ketokhazo, Hungary; Tatrbanar, Ukraine; Iaroslavsk, Russia;

- expulsion from villages, restrictions on freedom of domestic movement and free choice of residence, restrictions on citizenship granting in the newly formed states (Czech Republic, Croatia);

- racially-motivated attacks on Roma persons and collectives, enacted by extremist, neo-facist groups; attacks by neo-Nazi groups on Roma and other immigrants in the refugee camps of Germany;

frequent attacks and killing of Roma persons in the Bohemian region of the Czech Republic by "skinheads";

- governmental reluctance in condemning publicly, in a clear and unequivocal way, the overt violence and the expressed hostility conducive to violence against Roma persons and against the Roma population as a whole;

- direct or indirect discrimination in the administration of justice and of law enforcement regulations in specific cases; violation of the civil rights, fundamental freedoms and basic human rights of Romanies, as persons and communities;

- governmental agreements in Germany, France, Austria, and Switzerland on forced or semi-forced (i.e., voluntary-like) repatriation in Romania or in Macedonia of Roma refugees and asylum-seekers from the Balkans;

- the portrayal in police reports, in media and in public opinion of Roma as being those mainly responsible for increasing criminality in the transition societies of Eastern/Central Europe.

2. In close connection with such direct violations of the civil and political human rights of Roma persons, social changes operating at large in the politics, economics and cultures of eastern/central Europe are producing specific disadvantages and indirect discrimination for Roma persons and communities such as:

- free expression in the media and in political discourse of prejudice and hostility against Roma as epitoms for "strangers" and against other ethnic-national minorities; nationalistically oriented public opinion which is deliberately induced and exploited by emerging, new political "red-brown" forces and parties combining elements of totalitarian communism and ethnic nationalism;

- massive firing from industrial jobs of unskilled Roma, low-skilled workers; losing of regular sources of revenue for Roma seasonal or full-time agricultural workers of the former state- or cooperative-owned farms together with discrimination in land-distribution as part of land reform and property restoration;

- the resulting chronic, mass unemployment among Roma adults and lack of educational opportunities for Roma children and youngsters;
- chronic poverty and deterioration of Roma residential areas and resulting social tension between the Roma and the majority population.

III. ROMA "BAROMETER" FOR THE STATE AND TRENDS OF DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE.

While presenting such vulnerabilities of Roma populations in the new democracies, I will stress the role of anti-Gypsy attitudes and behaviours as a "barometer" for the political temperature and evolution of these countries, while the public treatment of Roma issues might equally serve as a test-case for the building of democratic institutions, of the rule of law and for the consolidation of the civil movements and associations in societies

and states deeply distorted by the decades of pro-fascist, authoritarian and communist totalitarian regimes.

I will shortly illustrate how this "Roma-meter" is working in predicting moods and movements in the political life of the post-communist states, with some examples:

-In August 1991, 200 Roma were forced to leave Mostar, in Bosnia. Few people, except Roma associations themselves, have noticed this event, although it was advertised during the CSCE Human Dimensions Conference in Moscow, (September-October 1991). We now know the effects of mass-scale "ethnic cleansing" and ethnic wars over Bosnia-Herzegovina.

-During 1990-1991 the government of the Northern-Rhein Westfalen land in Germany has silently negotiated with the authorities of the Macedonian Republic of the former Yugoslavia an agreement for the repatriation in Skopje of Yugoslav Roma who came to Germany as "Gast-arbeiters" in the 70's and as asylum-seekers in the 80's. This agreement, enforced since 1992, was the first international document concluded by the Macedonian government before resorting to full state sovereignty as an independent state. On Germany's part, this action and the public debate around it, served as a "test-case" for what in 1993 became hot polemics on the changing of the laws regulating restrictions on asylum and the rights of refugees in Germany.

Similar agreements for the repatriation of refugees from Romania and Bulgaria were concluded with the respective governments in 1992 and 1993.

And recently, Germany has announced the repatriation of a large number of refugees from former Yugoslavia; Romanian territory will seemingly serve as a transit point for this operation, after the successful rehearsing provided by the on-going repatriation of Roma citizens of Romania who have been locked out of refugee status in Germany, France and other Western European countries. The "fortress Europe" of the Schengen agreement is carefully testing its future walls, and Roma persons are among the first to be thrown-out of this new Europe, as they were equally thrown out of the medieval burghs, together with the Jews, as epitoms of "ethnic homeless" people.

- Another "Roma test": during the 1970s, seemingly 25,000 women, mostly Romani women, were involved in a program of sterilization in Czechoslovakia, especially in the Slovak part of the former Federation.

The meaning of that operation became more clear when in the Fall of 1993, Mr. Meciar, the former Prime-minister of the newly independent Slovak Republic, publicly complained about the rapid demographic growth of Romanies and the "burden" they represent for the social security of a state in full drive toward a ethnic-nationalistic legitimization of a controversial sovereignty.

- and still another (ba)Rom-meter: the polls on ethnic attitudes in Romania, the high hostility harvested by Roma in the middle-

sized cities, the prospect for violence and instability in such cities after the observed violence in rural settlements. The shortcomings in administration of justice and their potential danger for the stability of the public order and for ethnic tolerance. The test case represented by the prosecution of anti-Roma violence in a state where the fair administration of justice is reigning mainly in the newly adopted Constitution rather than in the Courts controlled by the prosecutors and judges who "snapped" from communist justice ideology to the emerging nationalistic populist moods.

IV. ROMA ASSETS IN THE TRANSITION FOR DEMOCRACY

- participation of Roma people in the process of building tolerance for (cultural-ethnic) diversity and democratic institutions;
- Roma entrepreneurship as a step in forging free-market oriented small-business;
- elaborating and implementing a concept of Roma trans-national culture and people;
- educating responsible citizens and supporters of transition processes in Eastern/Central Europe.

V. Concluding Proposal

"Roma test-cases" for the aftermath of the wars in former Yugoslavia, for the prevention of mass-scale ethnic violence and for the confidence-building measures in multi-ethnic regions.

- a joint Project on Ethnic Relations and Roma associations (International Romani Union, PERRAC) on defining and securing the legal and political status of Roma, as a non-territorial, basically multicultural population in the ethnically-divided regions and states of the former Yugoslavia.
- A conference to be organized in Sarajevo, in 1995, on this issue, as a non-governmental contribution to the peace settlements in former Yugoslavia and in Balkans.
- The CSCE/Council of Europe Human Dimension Seminar on Roma in Europe, Warsaw, September 1994: an opportunity to explore the governmental-non-governmental cooperation in addressing the Roma status in Europe and the Roma-related issues listed above.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KLARA ORGOVANOVA, PSYCHOLOGIST, SOCIAL WORKER AND
FORMER ADVISOR ON MINORITIES IN THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT

THE SITUATION OF THE ROMA IN SLOVAKIA

As in all post-Communist countries, the danger of national and ethnic conflicts in the Czech Republic and Slovakia becomes increasingly evident. An indefinite state has arisen—a state of nervousness, lack of certainties, a lack of concreteness when old rules are no longer valid, everything is changing, and the new rules do not yet exist.

The Roma (also known in English as “Gypsies”) form the second largest minority group in Slovakia. In 1991, the Roma of former Czechoslovakia obtained the right to freely proclaim themselves as members of a distinct national minority in the census. In Slovakia, 80,627 Roma (1.5 percent of the citizens of Slovakia), officially declared themselves as Roma. According to estimates of the urban and communal offices of the state administration from 1989, however, as many as 253,943 Roma live in Slovakia, thus constituting 4.8 percent of the population. Since these statistics did not include Roma who have a standard of living comparable to that of the majority population, Roma political and cultural activists estimate that the number of Roma in Slovakia is even higher, citing a figure of 350,000 to 400,000 in Slovakia.

The Romani population tends to suffer disproportionately from higher rates of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, crime and disease. When discussing the “Roma problem,” most references focus on the part of the Roma population living in very poor rural and urban conditions. The number of Roma living in unbearable conditions in rural communities and devastated central city zones is agglomerating and represents a potentially very serious societal, social and economic problem. Roma often live 2–3 kilometers outside of a village in camps or settlements with only a few dirty houses without facilities, in cellars, or in cardboard or wooden shacks. Some of the camps were built on dumping grounds or other areas containing materials such as mercury and arsenic, e.g. in a camp near Rudnany in eastern Slovakia.

In order to understand the present situation of Roma in Slovakia, the problem must be considered historically. The Roma in Slovakia, as elsewhere in Europe, formed an ethnic community, living socially on the periphery of the mainstream population. State policy nearly always focused on the Roma population not as a distinct ethnic minority, but perceived the Roma as a particularly antisocial and criminal group. This attitude was reflected in the policy of collecting special police evidence—finger print collections for members of Roma groups (1925), a law about wandering Roma (1927), and so on. During the Second World War, approximately 6,000 to 7,000 Roma from Bohemia and Moravia died in a special concentration camp at Auschwitz. The Slovak State also copied the racist legislation of the German Reich, and established special labor camps for the Roma, who were forbidden to travel by public means of transport, were allowed admission to towns and communities only on limited days and hours, their settlement units were separated from public roads and so on. After the occupation of Slovakia by the German Army, mass killings of Roma occurred in many places.

After the Second World War, the policy of the state was oriented towards assimilation of the Roma—in 1958, law No. 74 “On the permanent settlement of nomadic and semi-nomadic people” forcibly limited the movement of that part of the Roma (perhaps 5–10 percent), who still traveled. In the same year, the highest organ of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia passed a resolution, the aim of which was to be, “the final assimilation of the Gypsy population.” The so-called Gypsy question was reduced to a “problem of a socially backward section of the population.” The solution to the high number of children in Roma families took the form of administrative measures which were meant to financially motivate Roma women to undergo sterilization. State arrangements were also oriented to solving the problem of housing by the liquidation of backward Romani settlements and resettlement of Roma to urban setting. Although Roma cultural and ethnic identity was denied, organs of the state administration in communities and towns gave annual accounts of the “Gypsy population.” This evidence was collected without the knowledge of the Roma, who were categorized according to the criteria of the social services. Similarly, when there was a census, people were not able to proclaim their Romani ethnic identity, but the census officer marked the forms, to show that they were Roma without the knowledge of the respondents.

In April 1991, the demand for the equalization of the Roma with the other ethnic minorities in Slovakia was accepted by the Government of the Slovak Republic. The Declaration of Basic Human Rights and Freedom accepted by the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia on January 9, 1991 also secured the right to freely decide their

own ethnic affiliation. Individual ministries were developing an innovative approach to the Romani minority, securing their rights in the fields of culture and education.

NEW PROBLEMS/TENSIONS AFTER SPLIT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The disintegration of Czechoslovakia has created new problems for the Roma minority in both newly formed countries. Since 1992, Czech society has been increasingly apprehensive about mass migration of Roma from Slovakia to the Czech Republic. This fear persists despite a sociological study completed in the summer of 1992 which found that no concentrated movements of migration to the Czech part of the country had appeared until that time among the Slovak Roma.

In both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, responses of local authorities to increasing crime and social unrest have led to the passing of local regulations and decrees which embody a peculiar kind of discrimination against minorities. These regulations have disproportionately affected Roma. After the dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic some of its residents automatically acquired Slovak citizenship, even though they were born in the Czech Republic, had been living there for a long time and had their domiciles there (or places of permanent residence—a condition important according to the law). By this legal act they became aliens in their current homes and would have to apply for Czech citizenship if they wished. The required procedures were particularly difficult for Roma, who were handicapped most seriously by the condition that citizenship could be obtained only by a person without a criminal record over the last 5 years. This 5-year limit is equal to that required in other countries from refugees, who never had citizenship rights there. It was not so difficult to acquire Slovak citizenship: everybody who had a permanent residence in the Slovak Republic before dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic became a Slovak citizen.

Another example of those decrees was the so-called Jirkov decree dated 3 December 1992 which empowered the municipality without a judicial order or another legal action or court decision to dislocate persons from their residences predominantly because of violation of hygienic norms and regulations. This might have facilitated and simplified the process of getting rid of "unadaptables," predominantly Roma. The representatives of Jirkov were asked for the text of their decree by their colleagues from several other northern Czech towns (Usti Na Labem, Chomutov, Most).

These events inspired the proposal of an extraordinary antimigration bill in the Czech Parliament, which in many aspects went farther than the local decree of Jirkov; e.g. it instructed citizens to contact a registration office if they wished to accommodate persons without permanent residence in their flat, while police officers and other qualified persons would have been entitled to enter homes and to inspect them. Ultimately, the bill was not passed in the Czech Parliament, but had nevertheless been discussed, and this fact alone expresses enough of the negative attitudes towards the Roma. The Romani Civic Initiative lodged a protest but this did not prevent several cases in which Roma citizens were forced by police officers to relocate to Slovakia together with their families.

A similar tendency has developed among local state organs in Slovakia as well. In Spisske Podhradie, a small town in eastern Slovakia with a high concentration of Roma, the Mayor signed a decree in July 1993 which explicitly denied Roma and other "suspicious" persons of certain basic rights. allegedly an attempt to adopt measures to reduce Romani criminality, this decree was in contradiction with the Slovak Constitution and with international civil-right standards. Although the National Council condemned and abolished this decree the next week, before it could come into force (2 weeks were necessary), measures were taken by the government: the proposed solution was to reinforce police protection of the citizens in the town of Spisske Podhradie. Many other mayors agreed with the decree and wished to use it, had it not been in contradiction with the law.

Similarly, on August 7, 1993, in a televised interview, the mayor of the town Kezmarok stated that city police can now require Roma to show them identification documents at any time at any place. He was asked a question: "What measures would you—hypothetically—use if they were not in contradiction with law?" He answered: "e.g. permission to detain suspected Roma criminals for 2–3 days for examination; if the Roma were given welfare, they should do some work for public purpose, etc."

The whole affair also became more complicated due to a statement made by former Slovak Prime Minister Meciar at a meeting with local representatives in Spisske Podhradie in early September with an implicitly anti-Romani attitude. He talked about socially unadaptable persons, but everybody knew he meant the Roma. What is even worse is the general anti-Romani attitude of the Slovak official rep-

representatives at all levels, which is constantly spread by the mass media in order to influence public opinion without suggesting any specific solution or measures except to reinforce the police in these regions. Ironically, an all-powerful police force was also a strong aim of the previous totalitarian regime.

It is apparent that people in Slovakia in general are not aware of their human and civic rights; even those who were elected as local representatives. The consequence is that they do not understand what measures are acceptable, what are the appropriate attitudes, what kind of behavior leads to racial prejudice, etc.

Ideally, the problems of Roma and other minorities should be treated on a regional and community level. It is essential to create a mechanism for constant consultation between the community leadership and minority representatives and organizations. The solution of the problems of the minority must be an integral part of the region's overall development. Ideally, the central government should create effective administrative and judicial mechanisms to remedy discriminatory acts against Roma and other minorities. Furthermore, the central government should provide services to the regions to assist them in more comprehensive development which integrates development of Roma and other minority communities. Without a more decentralized approach to regional development (e.g. a better-functioning banking system which could provide loans, more local authority in real rather than formal terms), even the most well intentioned local governments will not be able to seriously approach these problems.

ROMA ETHNOPOLITICS

By Andrzej Mirga
President of the Roma Association in Poland

"While the Roma have every reason to blame others for much of their situation, they must also accept responsibility for much of their present condition. If that responsibility in the past has been diminished by a history of living under authoritarian regimes, from monarchist through fascist and communist periods, it cannot be avoided now during what Europeans generally hope is to be a period of social as well as political democracy. If the Roma want to benefit from new conditions, then they must also help to create them." - --M.Braham, The Untouchables. A Report to the Office of the UNHCR, p. 124.

The statement cited above implies two basic questions; first, to what degree should Roma feel responsibility for the present condition they live in and, second, how they can benefit from new conditions encompassing democracy?

In Central and Eastern Europe, the Roma themselves constitute probably the largest ethnic minority of between five and six million. Occupying the lowest and most stigmatized social position, they were and continue to be a real problem for governments and societies. The Roma relationship with the surrounding milieu was ambivalent at best. As a rule, however, that relationship has been marked by mutual mistrust, intercommunal tensions and even government sanctioned discrimination. They were regarded as strangers and undesirables and, as such were excluded from full and equal participation in social life.

A prejudiced view on the Roma underlies their "parasitism" and "criminality," which is generally exaggerated, reinforces exclusion and serves as justification for discriminatory actions against them. European states treated the Roma as a "people with distinctive identity but not nationality," and promoted policies of mass deportation, forced settlement, even forced sterilization of women and systematic extermination.

The former communist regimes conducted assimilation policies aimed at erasing Roma identity, communal integrity, and traditional way of life by assigning them to specifically designated types of work. These policies led to the relative stability of their existence and limited tensions between Roma and the rest of society. At least, the totalitarian and centralized system protected them from open discrimination and violence. It also guaranteed work, health care, education and housing. The Roma's relative stability did not help them overcome their vulnerable position in the societies they continued to occupy. A

"difficult legacy" that is not easy to eradicate or overcome worked to determine the present situation of the Roma.

During the ensuing transition period, with the collapse of the centralized economy and the upheavals of the free market, the Roma have been particularly vulnerable to the impoverishing effects of economic transformation as they are poorly educated, unskilled, unable to compete successfully for a job and poorly integrated both socially and economically.

As the data of many reports show, the Roma's present condition can be characterized as one of widespread, generally acute poverty, typified by massive unemployment, poor education, inadequate health care and substandard housing for major portion of the population. In the view of ordinary Roma people, the reality of new democracy gave them nothing but a growing sense of insecurity and deprivation of all sources of making a living. All those factors, mutually reinforcing each other, have become serious obstacles to the Roma's advancement.

Where and how can this vicious circle be broken? On behalf of Roma themselves, the only answer is to create organisations that will undertake collective actions aimed at securing recognition of their human and minority rights by the state and respective institutions. This is a difficult job for the Roma who only now are beginning to enjoy more cultural and political rights, and for whom the traditional structure of internal organization and power did not fit the constraints and demands of more formal organizations. The lack of competent elites as well as experience in leading more formal organizations add to the Roma's difficulties.

Nevertheless, just after the dissolution of communist regimes, Roma organizations flourished in the countries of that region, a process which was common to other minorities as well. That phenomenon, which could be called "ethnic revival" or "ethnic mobilization," expressed the will of the Roma to be integrated into the socio-political context of their respective states and societies under new conditions. Even if improved conditions for cultural and political activity of Roma organizations do not outweigh the increasing danger and insecurity for many, it is the only way to have an impact on decision-making processes, to be a partner and overcome dependency.

Self-reliance, independence, and proficiency of new Roma elites must be strengthened since those elites are the only hope for all others who are illiterate, poor and alienated. How important self-reliance, independence, and proficiency is can be proven here by just mentioning Nicolae Gheorghe's activities in Romania.

To answer the question raised by Braham at the outset of this statement, at least Roma elites were being responsible by trying to overcome the "difficult legacy" of the past and to respond to the new reality of the present--the reality of the escalation of ethnic hatred and violence against Roma--from the very start of new democracy-building in central and eastern Europe. In the wake of growing violence against Roma, their organisations were first to monitor and attract public, national and international attention; to request justice and respect of human and minority rights; to request protection on behalf of the victimized Roma.

Because of the requests by Roma organizations, the escalation of violent attacks against Roma became documented and recorded. Since 1992, at least 10 comprehensive reports were ordered by international organizations such as CSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly of Europe, the Council of Europe, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and others. This clearly demonstrates the urgency of the Roma problem in present day Europe. The activity of Roma organizations directly works toward improving democracy.

Can the Roma benefit from the new democracy, however? There are a few basic demands which must be fulfilled by the state and its institutions in order for the state legitimately to be called democratic. First, it there must be rule of law. That means that everyone obeys the law with full respect. Second, the state has to follow all appropriate human rights conventions and protocols. Third, since in many countries laws on status for minorities were passed, they have to be implemented. In accordance with laws on status for minorities, the Roma must be recognized as an ethnically, linguistically, and culturally distinctive population entitled to have ethnic minority status. As such, they must be granted all the rights and freedoms of minority status. As I said, at least elites accepted responsibility for much of the Roma's present condition and made the attempt to change that condition. We should demand the same from the other side, the state.

How the establishment of basic institutions and the passage of legislation regarding national and ethnic minorities is going can be proven by the following Polish case. After the parliamentary elections of June 1989, the problem of national and ethnic minorities could at least be noticed and taken up by public authorities. But few institutions dealing with that issue were created except for the Parliamentary Commission on National and Ethnic Minorities and the Government Commission on National Minorities. The activity of the Parliamentary Commission proved negligible, and the Government did practically nothing in practice.

The absence over a period of a few years of a government body responsible for policy with respect to national minorities was most inconvenient first and foremost for the minorities themselves who thus lacked a partner with whom to negotiate. Only the National Minorities Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Art, performed its tasks. However, its possibilities were limited and mostly concerned the distribution of a modest budget for minority cultural activities. The only institution to specifically assist minorities--The National Minorities Bureau--gave out small grants over 1991, 1992 and 1993 that have been steadily decreasing on an annual basis and have totaled as little as 0.2% of the Ministry of Culture and Art budget.

The problem of protecting national minorities has remained diffused among several departments. The urgent need for supplementing the Polish legal system with provisions directly applying to national minorities was demanded by minorities as early as 1989. There are still, however, no such regulations in force on both the statutory and supraparliamentary (constitutional) level. Instead, the problem of minorities was taken up in the course of preparing several new statutes on education, electoral rules for the Polish Diet, and radio and television. All of this seems to be a very impartial solution to the basic questions of minorities.

In 1994, with the assistance of the Helsinki Foundation, the minorities themselves made an attempt to work on a draft statute on minorities which will be one among a few others to be discussed in the newly elected Parliament. As this case clearly shows, minorities in Poland (with the possible exception of Germans), among them the Roma minority, suffer economic and organizational difficulties. There is no clear official policy towards the minorities. It is obvious for us that there is little hope that the European states on their own will promote a positive, and even affirmative, policy toward the Roma. It is our job to offer some solutions that take into consideration the distinctive features of Roma identity and culture and to implement them.

**REPORT BEFORE THE CONGRESSIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS HEARING
ON ABUSES AGAINST GYPSIES IN EASTERN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, APRIL 14TH 1994**

**ON THE ORIGIN AND CURRENT SITUATION
OF THE ROMANI POPULATION IN EUROPE
AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AMERICAN MEDIA
TO MAKE THAT SITUATION KNOWN**

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There are between seven and twelve million Roma ("Gypsies") throughout the world, about one million of whom live in the United States, and between five and eight million of whom live in Europe, particularly in eastern Europe. A non-white, non-territorial population of Asian origin, Roma are being subjected today to intense and increasing hostility. It is no exaggeration to say that their situation is one rapidly approaching crisis proportions, and the possibility of a second Romani genocide in the 20th century has been mentioned by more than one observer.

Despite the presence of a substantial Romani-American population, the general public in the United States continues to be misinformed about who and what "Gypsies" really are. Many people think Gypsies are not a real people at all; most believe us to be a population defined by how we dress and behave, a group to which anyone may belong if they adopt certain behavior. Because of this, and because of such widespread reinforcement of such an image in the media (both news and entertainment), the real situation of our people is not at all well known, and "Gypsy" continues to be a synonym for "thief" (cf. the common American slang term "gyp"). In 1992, the January 8th issue of the *New York Times* published the results of a public opinion poll surveying national negative attitudes to 58 different ethnic/racial American populations over a 25-year period. For the entire quarter-century, Gypsies were ranked at the very bottom. Since most Americans have no personal, social contact with Gypsies at all, such attitudes in this country can only be based upon how we are presented in the media. If the Romani situation is to be taken seriously, and if pressure can be brought to bear to ensure that steps be taken to halt the growing genocidal danger, two things must happen:

1) The American public, and especially those in control of news and information, must disabuse itself of the image of the "Hollywood" Gypsy. Until that happens, our people will continue to be unreal, fantasy figures, not to be taken seriously, and
 2) The situation of Roma must find a place in news broadcasts, and in documentary news programs such as *20/20*, *60 Minutes* and so on. At present, Roma are hidden behind other labels. In Germany, we are buried among "refugees," in ex-Yugoslavia, among "Muslims," in the Romanian state institutions, among "orphans."

It is the hope of PERRAC (the Project on Ethnic Relations Romani Advisory Council) and of the International Roma Federation, that those to whom this report is directed use whatever means are available to them to bring these changes about.

As many as 80% of the "Romanian" refugees in Germany are Roma, not ethnic Romanians. As many as 80% of the inmates in some Romanian state institutions (both orphanages and prisons) are, in fact, Roma, not ethnic Romanians (although Roma constitute only about 15% of the national population). Two weeks ago, a dramatized semi-documentary film called *Nobody's Children* was broadcast nationally on the USA cable network. It was about the children in those Romanian state homes (where the death rate in some of them is 65% per year), and one American couple's experiences trying to adopt one. The film was interspersed with real footage shot in some of those institutions by investigators from such human rights organizations as *Terre des Hommes*, and it was patently clear that the majority of the children were Romani. But not *once* was this specifically Romani plight mentioned in the film! If eighty percent of the children had been ethnic Hungarians (who also constitute between ten and fifteen percent of Romania's national population), it would have caused an international outcry. News of what is happening to Roma *must* be more widely acknowledged, if changes are to be brought about.

Because of the general lack of familiarity with the history and identity of our people, some background is provided here.

The Roma, or "Gypsies," are an Asian people of northern Indian origin, having left that part of the world about one thousand years ago as Rajput troops who were sent towards the West to resist the incursion of Islam and the attacks led by Mohammed Ghaznavid. The same spread of Islam towards Europe also caused the movement of the Romani people up from the Byzantine Empire (now Turkey) into the Balkans, by about AD 1250. Here, a good portion, perhaps half, of the Roma were kept in slavery in the area which is today Romania; this enslavement was not fully abolished until the 1860s, at the same time that African slavery was abolished in the United States. After the 1860s, a mass exodus of Roma came West, many ending up in North and South America. Most of the Romani American population came at this time and under these circumstances. Those who remained in Europe continued to suffer racially-motivated persecution, which culminated (though did not end) with the Holocaust, when between 75% and 85% of the European Roma were systematically murdered because they posed a racial threat to Hitler's ideal white population.

The reasons for anti-Gypsyism are complex, but originate not only in a difference in skin-color, language and dress, but also in the early erroneous identification of them with the Muslim threat (some names still applied to Roma today reflect this, including "Tatar," "Turk," "Saracen" and even "Egyptian," from which the English misnomer "Gypsy" derives). As for foreigners everywhere in Europe, Roma have no territorial, political, military or financial

strength, no homeland in which to seek refuge; they continue to be the perpetual "outsiders." Scapegoating is easy, since over a period of centuries, the population has not been in any position to protect itself from such charges. This continues to be the case, and has increased significantly in the past three years.

In addition to these factors, the Romani culture itself, being Indian in origin, has inherited aspects from the caste system which prohibit socializing between members of different castes. Having descended from the Kshatriya or warrior caste, civilians were, according to the Indian social structure, not to be fraternized with. The common Romani word for anybody who is not a Rom (i.e. not a Gypsy), is *gadjo*, which comes from the original Sanskrit word *gajha* which means "civilian." In traditional Gypsy culture, non-Gypsies, or "gadje," are to be avoided because they are seen to "pollute" or "defile" the Romani world, in a ritual sense. Romani culture is in some respects like orthodox Judaism, the parallels most clearly seen in habits of food preparation and personal hygiene. Since non-Roma do not follow these practices, they are seen as potentially dangerous. Clearly, such an excluding type of culture, one which does not allow outsiders to get very near, will quickly bring suspicion, and charges of unfriendliness and having something to hide. All of these factors have contributed to the general prejudice against Gypsies.

Because of historical factors, the period of enslavement in particular, the greatest concentration of Roma in Europe is in the east, specifically in the ex-Communist territories. Perhaps three quarters of Europe's Roma live in Eastern Europe, the greatest population by far in Romania. Under Communism, ethnic resentments were suppressed because of an ideology which placed the state above all things. Whatever people might have felt, they were not free to demonstrate it. After the collapse of Communism, however, ethnic hatreds came to the surface very quickly, with the events in ex-Yugoslavia as just one highly visible example. The splitting-up of ex-Czechoslovakia and the ex-Soviet Union are obviously other examples. Whereas under Communism, popular blame for mismanagement was directed upwards, it is now being directed downwards, and Roma, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, have become everybody's scapegoat, and are being subjected to increasingly blatant and virulent hatred. Our office has documented evidence of pogroms, rapes, murders, lynchings or mutilations from all over eastern Europe, and even from places in the West such as France, Spain, Italy and Germany. Just yesterday we received a report from Britain (in *European Race Audit* for March) of a blockade of 380 townspeople attempting to prevent the construction of dwellings for Roma in Somerset. Last month, we learned of the lynching of a Rom in Spain. Without exception, every published public opinion poll from the different European countries indicate clearly that the most hated ethnic/racial population everywhere, without exception, is the Roma. This quote, from the December 19th, 1993, issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle* (pages A-1 and A-15) illustrates what is going on at this moment:

An orgy of mob lynching and house-burning, with police collaboration, has turned into something even more sinister for Romania's hated Gypsies: the beginnings of a nationwide campaign of terror launched by groups modeling themselves on the Ku Klux Klan. . . "We are many, and very determined. We will skin the Gypsies soon. We will take their eyeballs out, smash their teeth, and cut off their noses. The first will be hanged.

Last September 20th in Romania (in the Transylvanian town of Hădăreni) three Roma were killed and 170 forced to flee from their homes, which were burned down, in an outbreak of racial violence during which police did nothing to intervene. One woman involved in the pogrom said "We didn't commit murder; how can you call killing Gypsies 'murder'?" Such action had been announced in the spring by an organization called The Anti-Gypsy Militant Organization" in Ploiești, whose spokesman, a doctor from Teleorman, told a journalist representing the Hungarian paper *Gyarmát* that "the war against the Gypsies will start during the fall. Until then, preparations will be made to obtain arms. First, we are going to acquire chemical sprays." On March 8th last, Germany began to arrest and deport Romani asylum seekers in that country back to Bosnia via Romania, to whom they have offered aid in return; last November they did the same thing, returning Roma in handcuffs to Romania, to whom they paid \$21 million. Lufthansa refused to transport those Roma in protest, but they were deported by rail. The French government has put a similar plan into operation, with a December, 1994, deadline. A press release from the Roma National Congress dated 20th April 1994 reported that, in an unsuccessful search for hidden weapons,

Led by a unit of the notorious anti-terrorist squad Mobiles Einsatzkommandos, police broke their way into the home of Roma National Congress president Rudko Kawczynski at dawn on Wednesday, April 13th. The masked men were carrying guns and were dressed in dark clothes . . . Kawczynski and his son were beaten by policemen and later received medical treatment; other family members were stripped naked and their body openings searched. The police then proceeded to the joint offices of the Roma National Congress and the Rom and Cinti Union in the centre of Hamburg, where more than 20 officers conducted an eight-hour search. They confiscated several dozen files and copied the memories of all five office computers. The files and data contain information on RNC and RCU members and employees, international contacts . . . among the material taken are files relating to RNC activities in multilateral organizations, the CSCE and the Council of Europe, and information on Romani organizations.

The vast majority of Roma living in the Czech Republic have been categorized as Slovakian citizens, whether or not they were born in Slovakia or have any connection with that country. All individuals so categorized must now apply for Czech citizenship, for which the restrictions ensure that most applicants are ineligible. Slovakia meanwhile claims no responsibility for them, and thus the number of stateless, jobless, homeless Roma in that part of Europe grows, together with the incidence of crimes motivated by desperation, and the refugee situation in neighboring countries increases.

In ex-Yugoslavia, the same is happening, although with the fighting going on, violence against Roma is less organized. It is no less harsh, however. We have reports that in Banja Luka, Gypsies have been forced to cross minefields to test for hidden landmines, and are being kept physically from entering refugee camps where they could find some safety. A fax transmission from the London *Times* dated April 6th informed us of reports of Roma being used as forced labor to dig trenches on the front lines; the Gypsy settlement near Prijedor

in Bosnia was "ethnically cleansed" of its inhabitants in March this year. In Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands this year (and each year since 1990) I have met, and spoken at length with, Roma from Bosnia and elsewhere in ex-Yugoslavia who have described the conditions there. For reasons I have outlined above, this gets little or no media coverage in the American press, although the French-language news service received in New York City devoted a 15-minute segment entirely to the plight of Gypsies in Bosnia-Hertzevovina. The Israeli and the Canadian press have also dealt with this; the Friday, August 21st, issue of *The Toronto Globe and Mail* reported on its front page that "thousands of Muslim and Gypsy refugees have been dumped back into Bosnia-Hertzevovina by Croatian military police...the cycle of separation, fear, dislocation and possible death is continuing."

According to the report on the Yugoslav Islamic Romani population in *Muslim Peoples* (Richard Weekes, ed.),

The 1971 census reports 78,485 Gypsies in Yugoslavia, but both official sources and the reliable scholars consider the true figure to be much higher, probably around 20 times as many [i.e. over one and a half million]. The issue is confounded further by not knowing what proportion of these are Muslim, although one can assume that roughly one half [i.e. as many as 750,000] are."

Unlike the Bosnians and Serbs and Croats, the Roma have no regional ethnic territory, and are not able to organize for self-preservation. For this reason, they are very easy targets. Gypsy women are frequently raped, and we have heard of individuals being doused with gasoline and set alight. A common claim in Slovenia is that "in the event of a third world war, Slovenes will kill the Gypsies first." A report published in the current issue of *Patrin* states, in part, that

At the beginning with Slovenia, and later with Croatia, Roma were attacked by all nationalist and chauvinist currents. National armies were formed, and everyone seized Roma. Each republic of former Yugoslavia warned its citizens not to follow YNA's (the Yugoslav National Army's) call-up, but to join the corresponding national military groups. The German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung* reported that in the fighting between Serbs and Croats, Roma were just being used for "cannon fodder." . . . It became notorious on December 1st, 1991, that in the last morning of November, eleven Roma, Mišo Bogdan, Lazo Bogdan, Tihomir Ivanovic, Josip Bogdan, Drago Kalanji, Mile Petrovic, Boško Petrovic, Adam Željko and Ruso Kleš had been treacherously killed and massacred . . . The fate of the Roma in Bosnia [whether Muslim or not] is the same as the Muslims.

The points I want to emphasize at this hearing are four in number:

1. There are literally *millions* of Gypsies throughout Europe, and they are not going anywhere. They are here to stay. The solution can only be through accommodation. The alternative, mass genocide of the Romani people, has been tried twice in European history,



and didn't work either time. These millions of Gypsies are in every part of Europe occupying other people's territories, and are therefore everywhere viewed as outsiders. The possibility cannot be dismissed that the plight of Roma in Romania, Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere does not receive serious, concerned attention by our government simply because Roma are a non-territorial, non-national, non-economic population, and because no territory or economy is jeopardised by their persecution, and because no government exists to speak in their defense or complain about their abuse. Concern for repercussion of this kind is simply not a component to be alert for in the Gypsy case.

2. Despite between seven and eight hundred years in the West, and despite greater or lesser genetic interbreeding with the white population, Roma remain a *non-European* people with a *non-European* racial heritage, speaking a *non-European* language used to express a *non-European* culture and world view. These linguistic and cultural differences must be taken into consideration if constructive changes are to be brought about.

3. The present situation is the end of a continuum of oppression and persecution which stretches back into eight centuries of European history. Only by acknowledging this and by understanding the contemporary situation in its historical context, will positive change be brought about. Communist ideology does not recognise historical factors, but looks only forwards, and while Communism is gone, administrators remain in office whose thinking has not changed. Unless it is clearly understood and explained *why* Roma are in their present condition, what historical factors have brought it about, and who has been responsible for it, we will not move forward.

4. The way to deal with these points is through education. The increasing involvement of the American government in eastern European affairs, and its commitment to lead the way towards the new society, means that Americans, both in the administration and in the general population, *must* know more about Roma. The widespread image of the "Hollywood Gypsy" must be gotten rid of if the public is to begin to recognize the Roma are real people with very real, and serious, problems. The media have been largely responsible for keeping the stereotype alive, and the same media must take the lead in laying it to rest.

The International Roma Federation would be pleased to provide further documentation in support of the claims made in this summary.

Dr. Ian F. Hancock
April 14th, 1994

AFTERNOTE:

On April 15th, Associated Press released two Gypsy-related stories; one by David Briscoe detailing the congressional hearing at which this report was presented – an historic first – and the other, unsigned, entitled "Gypsy family feud involves police." The *New York Times* printed neither story, but did include a photograph of the Romani representatives, with the caption "Gypsies gather in Washington" in its April 15th issue. The *Daily Texan* (Austin, Texas) printed only the story concerning police intervention in a family dispute. It is unlikely that they would have devoted three columns to the story had the families been Mexican American or Irish.

I repeat: the media have a responsibility to present the Romani people and the Romani situation in a factual and unbiased way if anything is to change.



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